

Welcome to Mental Health Court...*And Everything That Comes With It*

by The Honorable Jan R. Jurden, Superior Court of Delaware

I looked up from the sentence order I was writing to see blood spurting from the defendant's arm. A split second earlier he had been pleading with me to believe that he hadn't violated his probation. "He's got a blade," is what I heard.

What I saw was a lot of blood shooting up in the air and splattering all over the bailiff who held his arm. I looked at the defendant's face. He was perfectly calm despite the fact his arm was gushing blood. He stared directly at me and my eyes met his. His stare never wavered. In his eyes I saw a triumphal look. "Look what I did," is what his eyes said.

The bailiff had his left arm in a firm grasp, serving the dual purpose of subduing him and slowing down the bleeding. The probation officer, who had just recommended that the defendant be sent to prison pending placement in a strict drug treatment facility, had his right arm in a forceful grip. My sentencing clerk, God bless her, approached the defendant with a wad of tissues in a vain attempt to stem the flow. I asked her to step back, worried what he might do and that he might be HIV positive (he is an IV-drug user).

I know the whole episode took only seconds to unfold, but as *cliché* as it might sound, it seemed like forever. Another bailiff ran in with paper towels and gloves. Everything after this is a blur. I remember the bailiffs and a courthouse security officer whisking the defendant out of the courtroom. I looked at the social workers, his public defender, the probation officer, the court reporter and the clerk. They looked at me, all of us speechless and in disbelief as to what we had just witnessed.